

In the Claims:

Claims 1-23 (Canceled)

24. (Previously presented) A method for processing a semiconductor structure defining a metallization layer which results in said metallization layer being substantially free of damage comprising the steps of:

capping a top surface of said semiconductor structure that defines said metallization layer with a thin stop layer;

forming a layer of dielectric over said thin stop layer, said layer of dielectric defining at least one area where said thin stop layer is exposed; and

removing said exposed thin stop layer to expose a top surface of said metallization layer which is substantially free of damage.

25. (Original) The method of claim 24 wherein said step of forming a layer of dielectric comprises forming a patterned layer of dielectric according to a patterned layer of resist, said patterned layer of dielectric defining a layout for an upper layer of metallization, and said step of removing further comprises removing said patterned layer of resist.

26. (Canceled)

27. (Currently amended) The method of claim 24 wherein said thin stop layer is deposited to a thickness of less than about 100Å.

28. (Original) The method of claim 25 further comprising the step of filling said layout etched in said dielectric layer with a conductive metal, such as copper.

29. (Original) The method of claim 24 wherein said thin stop layer is an organic material.

30. (Original) The method of claim 24 wherein said thin stop layer contains a metal.

31. (Original) The method of claim 24 wherein said thin stop layer comprises at least one of the materials selected from the group consisting of SiC, SiCN, SiCO, SiN, SiO, SiOCH, and combinations thereof.

32. (Original) The method of claim 24 wherein said thin stop layer is multilayered.

33. (Original) The method of claim 24 wherein said thin stop layer is deposited by at least one of the processes selected from the group consisting of PVD (Plasma Vapor Deposition), CVD (Chemical Vapor Deposition), ALD (Atomic Layer Deposition), and Ion Beam Deposition.

34. (Original) The method of claim 24 wherein said thin stop layer is deposited at a temperature of between about 200°C and about 500°C.

35. (Original) The method of claim 24 further comprising the following steps for forming said semiconductor substrate:

depositing a dielectric layer;

forming a trench in said dielectric layer;

forming a metal seed layer over the dielectric layer with said trenches; and

depositing a metal in said trench.

36. (Original) The method of claim 35 further comprising forming a barrier layer over the surface of said trench prior to forming said seed layer.

37. (Original) The method of claim 36 wherein said barrier layer includes at least one of the materials selected from the group consisting of Ta, TaN, Ti, TiN, and combinations thereof.

38. (Original) The method of claim 37 wherein said step of forming a metal seed layer comprises the step of forming a first metal seed layer and then forming a second metal seed layer over said first seed layer.

39. (Original) The method of claim 38 wherein the surface of said second metal seed layer has a smooth surface.

40. (Original) The method of claim 37 wherein at least one of said first and second metal seed layers are selected from the group consisting of copper, aluminum, gold, silver, tungsten and tantalum nitride.

41. (Original) The method of claim 40 wherein said metal seed layers are deposited by a process selected from the group consisting of PVD (Plasma Vapor Deposition), CVD (Chemical Vapor Deposition), ALD (Atomic Layer Deposition), and ECP (Electro Chemical Process).

42. (Original) A method of forming the layout for an upper level of metallization in a semiconductor with reduced damage to a lower level of metallization comprising the steps of:

providing a substrate having a surface, said surface including a top surface of said lower level of metallization;

capping said lower level of metallization with a stop layer deposited to a thickness of less than 300Å over said surface;

forming a patterned layer of dielectric over said etch stop layer according to a patterned layer of resist on said dielectric layer, said patterned dielectric layer defining said layout for an upper level of metallization, and said layout including at least one area where said etch stop layer is exposed; and

removing said patterned resist and said exposed etch stop layer to expose, substantially damage free, a portion of said top surface of said lower level of metallization.

43. (Original) A method of forming an upper level of metallization in a semiconductor device with reduced damage to a lower level of metallization comprising the steps of:

providing a substrate having a top surface, said top surface defining said lower level of metallization;

capping said lower level of metallization with a stop layer deposited to a thickness of less than 300Å over said top surface;

depositing a layer of inter-metal dielectric (IMD) over said stop layer;

depositing and patterning a layer of resist to define a patterned mask over said layer of IMD;

etching said layer of IMD to remove material according to said mask, said removed material defining the layout for an upper level of metallization, and said layout including at least one area where said layer of IMD is completely etched through to expose said stop layer;

removing said patterned resist and said exposed stop layer; and

filling said layout etched in said IMD layer with metal to form said upper layer of metallization.